Chapter 39
MAKING THE ROSES TIRED ME OUT TOO...
...BUT SPENDING TIME IN THAT MAN'S COMPANY, MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE...
...VISCERALLY SICKENS ME STILL.
ぐったり
WEARY
I'M BEAT.
TCH!
HMM?

...TWO-FACED SNAKES, FATHER AND DAUGHTER ALIKE.
MUTTER
HM?
BA SEN WOUND UP COMING WITH ME TO ESCORT YOU-KNOW-WHO TO VERDIGRIS.
THOUGH HE'S GRUFF, I KNOW I CAN COUNT ON HIM.
...BUT, UH, SOMETHING SEEMS TO HAVE SOURED HIS MOOD.
OH.
CONSORT LOULAN AND HER ENTOURAGE.
THE GARDEN BANQUET IS LONG OVER, BUT SHE STAYED.

OH, I SEE.
SO IF THAT'S THE "FATHER AND DAUGHTER" IN QUESTION...
...THAT MAN IS THE ONE WHO FORCED HIS DAUGHTER'S WAY INTO THE EMPEROR'S HAREM.
HE'S BEEN A SENIOR OFFICIAL SINCE THE TIME OF THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR.
FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE CURRENT EMPEROR, WHO BELIEVES IN MERIT OVER SENIORITY...
...THIS MAN IS A THORN IN HIS SIDE. OR SO I'VE HEARD...
GRRRR!
STILL...

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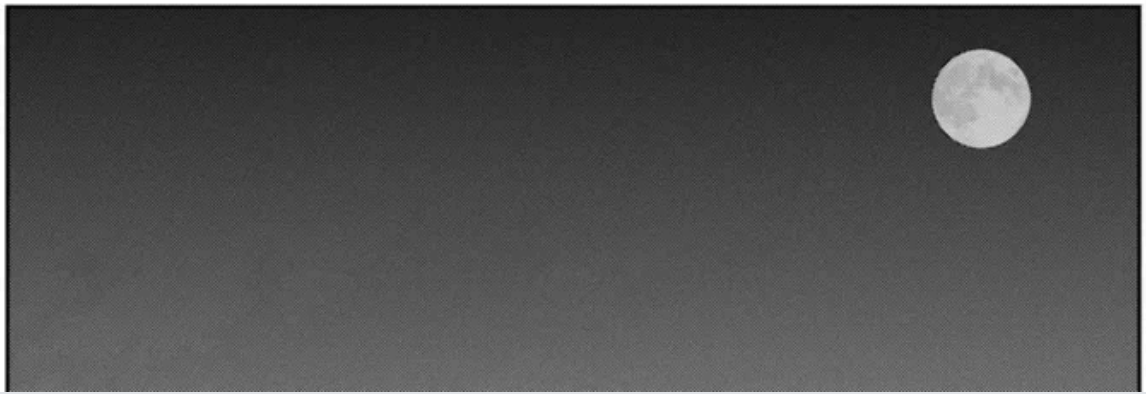
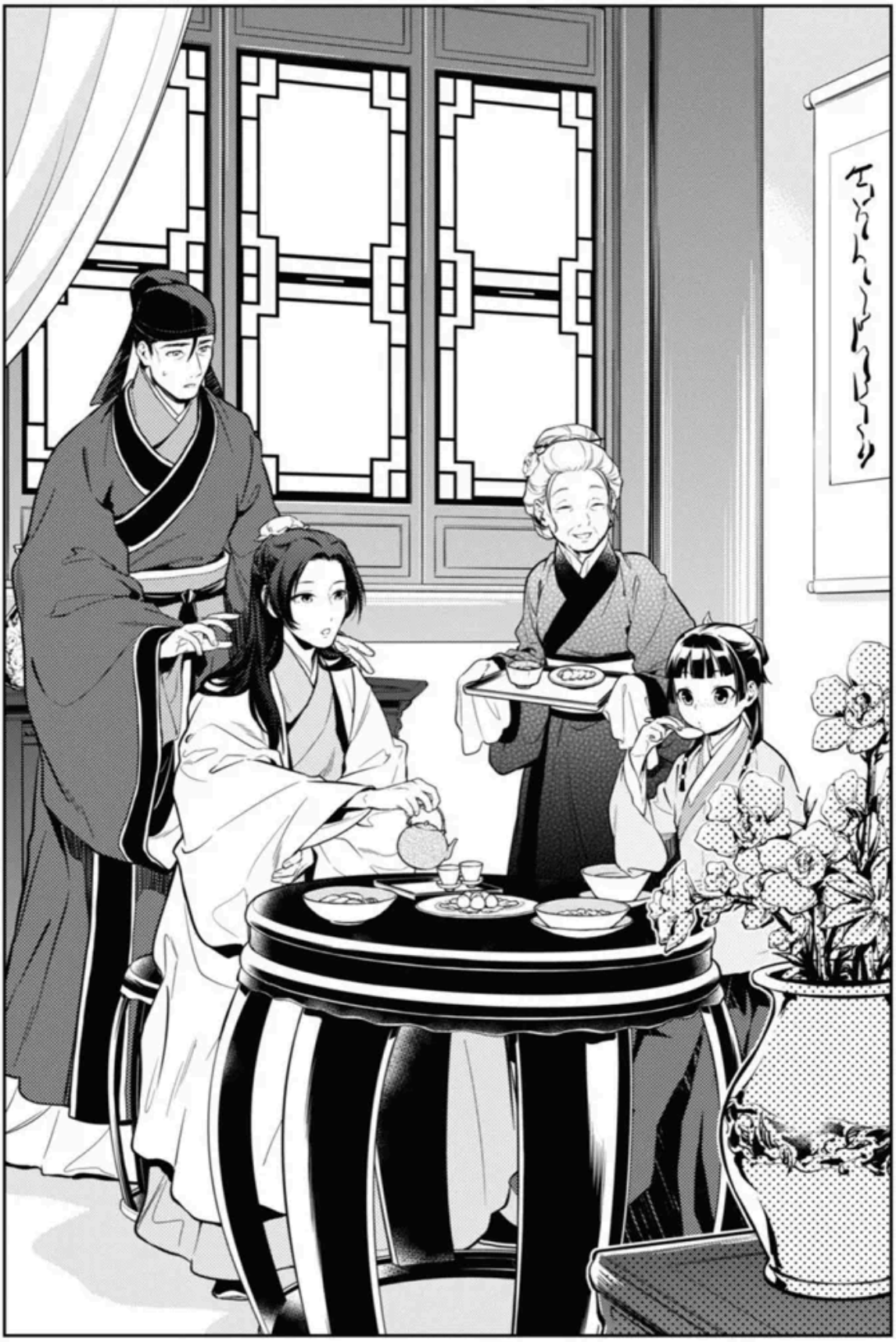
WE'RE AROUND THE SAME AGE...
BEING MISTAKEN AS A PART OF THIS CONVERSATION WOULD ONLY BRING ME GRIEF.
...BUT I DO WISH HE'D STOP BAD-MOUTHING HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS.
HMPH!
...I REALIZE IT'S JUST ME HERE ...

...BUT HE'S STILL QUITE IMMATURE.



Chapter 39 Rose Balsam and Wood Sorrel ③



OH MY!
OH DEAR! I SAY! YOU'RE NOTHING BUT SKIN AND BONES NOW!
SIT YOURSELF DOWN, AND I'LL BRING YOU A BITE TO EAT!
LIMP
PHEW...
64

...IF HE DISCOVERED THE LETTER I HID IN THE BOX WITH THE ROSE.
I WON-DER...
...YOU HEAR?
EAT YOUR FILL, NOW...
WELL ...
...SIS'LL BE THERE. MEIMEI WILL SEE IT DONE EVEN IF HE DOESN'T FIND IT.

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...YOU UTTERLY DESPISED THAT TACTICIAN.
AND HERE I WAS SURE...
I DO DISLIKE HIM, BUT I DON'T DESPISE HIM.
THAT'S NOT HOW IT LOOKED TO ME.
SIR JINSHI.
I ADMIT MY REACTIONS TO HIM ARE SOMEWHAT PRONE TO EXCESS...
...BUT IF HIS AIM IN THE BED-CHAMBER WASN'T TRUE, I WOULDN'T BE HERE TODAY.
...SURELY THERE'S A BETTER WAY TO PHRASE THAT.
AGHAST
BUT IT IS THE TRUTH.

I KNOW NOT WHAT YOU IMAGINED...
...BUT NO COURTESAN WOULD BEAR A CHILD AGAINST HER WILL.
THE PLEASURE DISTRICT IS AWASH WITH POTIONS AND POWDERS TO PREVENT PREGNANCY AND EVEN INDUCE ABOR-TION.
AND IF IT HAD BEEN EARLY ON ENOUGH, THERE WOULD'VE BEEN WAYS TO MAKE SURE THE PREGNANCY DIDN'T TAKE.
SHE MUST HAVE HAD ME BECAUSE SHE WANTED TO.
BY KEEPING TRACK OF THE CYCLE OF A WOMAN'S MENSES...
...ONE CAN PREDICT TO SOME EXTENT WHEN SHE IS MOST LIKELY TO CONCEIVE.
COUR-TESANS HAVE EVEN BEEN KNOWN TO WRITE LETTERS ...
...ASKING TO RE-SCHEDULE VISITS FROM THEIR PATRONS AS A RESULT.
IF ANYTHING, I BET IT WAS PLANNED.
BY THE TACTICIAN? I FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE ...

WOMEN ARE DEVIOUS CREA-TURES.
AND THAT WAS WHY ...
...WHEN HER PLOT FAILED, SHE LOST HER MIND.
SHE WAS SO WELL AND TRULY GONE THAT SHE DIDN'T EVEN FLINCH AT THE THOUGHT OF HARMING HERSELF.
SIR JINSHI, THE TACTI-CIAN...
HE'S NEVER TRIED TO TALK TO YOU OUTSIDE OF YOUR OFFICE, HAS HE?
HM?
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I SUPPOSE NOT.
IT'S ALWAYS MY OFFICE HE'S BARGING INTO UNINVITED.

HE CAN'T TELL PEOPLE'S FACES APART.
?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I COULDN'T TELL YOU WHY...
...BUT WHILE HE KNOWS HOW EYES AND MOUTHS LOOK ON THEIR OWN, HE JUST CAN'T COMPREHEND THE FACES THEY'RE ASSEMBLED INTO.
FROM WHAT I HEAR, EVERYONE LOOKS THE SAME TO HIM.
THAT'S WHAT PA TOLD ME.
I PITY HIM.
HE'S EXTRAORDINARY...
...BUT HE'S ALWAYS SUFFERED BECAUSE OF THAT IMPAIRMENT.
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AND THAT'S THE ONLY REASON YOU SO BLATANTLY HATE HIM?
I BELIEVE IT'S FROM HERE THAT HIS ODD OBSESSION STEMS.
CURIOUSLY, THOUGH, HE CAN ALWAYS IDENTIFY ME AND MY ADOPTIVE FATHER. JUST THE TWO OF US.
I CAN STILL RECALL THAT DAY CLEARLY.
HAAH...
I SIMPLY CAN'T TOLERATE HIM ON A VISCERAL LEVEL.
OUT OF NOWHERE, A MAN COVERED IN BLOOD APPEARED BEFORE ME.
HE TOOK ONE LOOK AT ME AND STARTED CACKLING WHILE CREEPING EVER CLOSER.

THAT MEMORY WAS SEARED INTO MY YOUNG MIND AS THE PICTURE OF "FEAR."
!!!
BECAUSE PA KNEW THAT MAN HAD DONE WRONG...
BECAUSE PA KNEW THE WOMAN WITH THE MISSING NOSE...
BUT PA DIDN'T STOP THE OLD BIDDY...
...FROM BEATING THE SCARY MAN WITH HER BROOM.

...I GREW MORE OR LESS NUMB TO THE SIGHT OF HIM.
すん SNUB...
AND AFTER BEING FACED WITH THIS BLOODY DEVIL COMING BY OVER AND OVER TO SEE ME...
BUT THE MAN STILL DIDN'T LEARN.
SIR JINSHI, LET ME ASK YOU THIS.
HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF MISTER MONOCLE TOLD YOU, "CALL ME 'PAPA'"?
I'D WANT TO SMASH THAT MONOCLE INTO BITS.
QUITE.
.....
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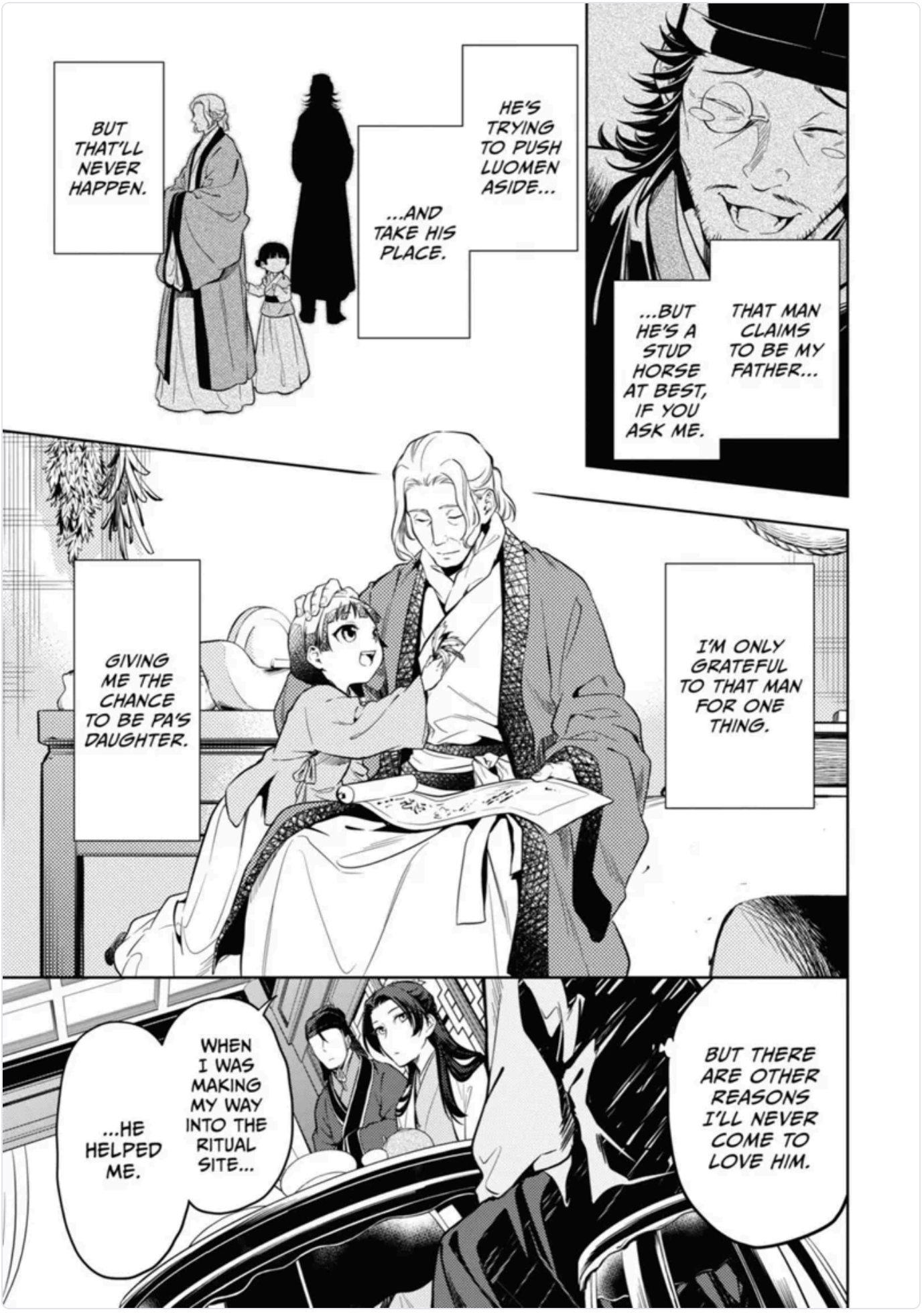
BUT THAT'LL NEVER HAPPEN.
HE'S TRYING TO PUSH LUOMEN ASIDE...
...AND TAKE HIS PLACE.
THAT MAN CLAIMS TO BE MY FATHER...
...BUT HE'S A STUD HORSE AT BEST, IF YOU ASK ME.
GIVING ME THE CHANCE TO BE PA'S DAUGHTER.
I'M ONLY GRATEFUL TO THAT MAN FOR ONE THING.
...HE HELPED ME.
WHEN I WAS MAKING MY WAY INTO THE RITUAL SITE...
BUT THERE ARE OTHER REASONS I'LL NEVER COME TO LOVE HIM.

THAT'S JUST THE KIND OF PERSON HE IS.
BUT HE COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN ANYTHING ABOUT IT AT THE TIME...
THE TACTI-CIAN DID?
IT'S NOT A STRETCH TO THINK HE WAS BEHIND LI HAKU BEING SO QUICK TO LOOK INTO SUIREI...
...AND ALSO THE SWIFT ACTION TAKEN BY THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE IN HER CASE.
THE THOUGHT OF THAT FILLS ME WITH RAGE.
UNLIKE ME, HE DOESN'T COLLECT EVIDENCE AND FORM A HYPOTHESIS AROUND IT.
HE GOES BY HIS GUT TO INTUIT WHETHER OR NOT SOMETHING IS SUSPECT ...
...AND THAT INTUITION IS SELDOM WRONG.
BUT THE INFURIATING THING IS, HE DEEMS IT TO BE TOO BOTHERSOME TO PERSONALLY DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

IF THE MAN HAD ACTED OPENLY IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY ...
...I MIGHT'VE HAD AN ELIXIR IN MY POSSESSION TO BRING PEOPLE BACK TO LIFE RIGHT NOW!
GRIP
WHAT I'M FEELING IN THIS MOMENT IS JEALOUSY.
I KNOW.

...HOW MANY INDIVIDUALS TALENTED ENOUGH TO EARN PA'S OPEN PRAISE WOULD I ACTUALLY FIND?
EVEN IF I SEARCHED ALL THE LAND OVER...

HE HAS NO IDEA HOW BLESSED HE TRULY IS.
WE CAN'T MAKE HIM AN ALLY, BUT WE SHOULD TAKE CARE NOT TO MAKE HIM OUR ENEMY.
VERY WELL.
HMPH!

...THAT NO FATHER IN THIS WORLD...
...ACTUALLY WANTS TO BE HATED.
PLEASE BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL YOU...
WHAT'S WRONG?
JUST...
OH DEAR.

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